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ABSTRACT

Comprising mostly succinct expository statements, guidelines, and charts, this presentation attacks many cultural and educational myths in the areas of the grading and grouping of students at the middle school level. It stresses the importance of understanding what intelligence and academic success really are, and suggests ways in which teachers can modify their attitudes and curriculum to help all students achieve academic success. It advocates an inverted pyramid structure of grading, providing as much success as possible for as many students as possible, in as many areas of school as possible. It also criticizes questionable grading practices, such as using varying grade scales, using zeros indiscriminately, failing to match testing to teaching, relying on surprise quizzes, and penalizing students for taking intellectual risks. It suggests remedies for such practices, including consistent and fair grading, letting students know what is expected of them, giving feedback before grades, and encouraging intellectual risk-taking. It suggests that students be grouped according to previous grades and performance, teacher and counselor recommendations, parent and student choice, demographics, and standardized test results. (MDM)

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ED 366 462

EXPLODING MYTHS, EXPLORING TRUTHS: HUMANE, PRODUCTIVE GRADING AND GROUPING IN THE QUALITY MIDDLE SCHOOL

Barry Raebeck, Ph.D.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Themes

The Right to Be Intelligent

Exploding Myths:
...of the Culture
...of School
...of Teachers
...of Intelligence
...of Discipline
...of Teaching/Learning
...of Testing and Grading

Exploring Truths:
...of Legitimate Educational Goals
...of Success for Students
...of Evaluation
...of Grouping and Tracking
...of School/Home Relations
...of Sustaining Innovation
...of Play Teaching and Real Teaching

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Questions and Comments from the Group

Note: due to the amount and quality of information to be communicated Barry will move quickly. Please save all comments (other than questions of clarification) for the conclusion of the presentation. Barry will be happy to stay longer still to continue the discussion, room availability permitting. Thank you--and glad you're here!

PS 022 114

Specific Practices for Creation of a Quality School:

Grading/Evaluation

No grades as an option

Hard to Fail does not mean *Easy to Get an A*

Three Honor Rolls

Flexibility of letter grades: A, B, C for Outstanding, Commendable, Acceptable

Additional kinds of Grades: CP, I, U = Unacceptable (No D's or F's)

Virtually No Retention

Instant 8th Graders

Grouping

Pyramidal Structures

Fallacies of Grouping in an "Academic" District

No/Limited Grouping as an option

Flexible, Broad-based Grouping

Grouping without Tracking

Abolishing Leper Colonies

The Learning Lab

School/Home Relations

Letter of Commendation

Report Card

Progress Report

Thoughtfulness and Articulation

About Barry Raebeck, Ph.D.

Barry has been active in educational transformation for many years. He has served as a public school teacher, principal, counselor, and central office administrator, and has worked with students at all levels of education, kindergarten through graduate school. Dr. Raebeck frequently consults with school districts and universities throughout the East. He has published articles in *Educational Leadership, Phi Delta Kappan, NASSP Bulletin, Education Digest*, and *The Clearinghouse*, among others. Barry regularly presents at national conferences, including ASCD and NMSA.

Middle level transformation is an area of particular interest and expertise, as Barry has led such processes at the classroom, school, and district level. His recent book, Transforming Middle Schools: A Guide to Whole-School Change, published by Technomic, Inc, of Lancaster PA, details in an upbeat, readable, and easily-grasped fashion the essentials of transition to a truly effective middle school program. When he was principal of Thomas Harrison Middle School in Virginia, that program was recognized as exemplary by ASCD, featured on a University of Virginia statewide telecast, and Barry was asked to serve on the Virginia Department of Education Middle School Task Force.

Dr. Raebeck believes that the central issues of transformation are joy, quality, imagination, courage, and spirit. Without these elements, too many of our efforts will prove ineffectual, and too many of our schools will fail to thrive.

Currently, Barry is Director of Curriculum for the Abington PA Schools, a dynamic and increasingly diverse district in Montgomery County, just outside of Philadelphia. He may be reached at 970 Highland Ave, Abington PA 19001, phone (215) 881-2503, and welcomes communication from other educators.

from The Right to be Intelligent, by Luis Alberto Machado

If intelligence were innate, no man would be free.
If men were not equal, democracy as a system of government would lack a reason for being.

Always efforts have been made to justify every type of social discrimination with scientific or theological reasons: nature, not men, is the cause of the inequalities that justify the submission of some men to others.

Empires have been founded on the belief that there are peoples in conditions of natural inferiority.

Those who have concluded that races are not equal, start from the premise that their own race occupies a position of preeminence.

In every man who believes himself superior to his fellows by nature, there exists a potential racist.

The human brain has not varied since the Upper Paleolithic Age.

With the same brain, the number and quality of creative men have been increasing constantly.

Who produces them?...chromosomes...or education?

Education is the key.

What has changed and in turn caused change, is not the brain, it is education.

At birth, the minds of children forty thousand years ago were the same as the minds of today's children.

No one is born civilized or primitive.

According to what is considered one of nature's own arrangements, women have been subjected to the greatest injustice ever perpetrated.

For centuries, men believed that women were programmed to feel and not to think, in the same way they were programmed for pain because they bore their children in pain.

Today we know that children can be born without pain and that woman has demonstrated herself to be as unquestionably capable of excellence in any intellectual activity as man.

Until now intelligence has been a privilege.
The last stronghold of privilege.
The most ill-distributed wealth on earth.
The cause and foundation of the remaining privileges.
Every oligarchy is in the last analysis an intellectual oligarchy.
Intelligence is a synonym for power.
Meditation on intelligence is meditation on power.
The power of intelligence constitutes the principal source of oppression in all of history.

Can any sort of teaching take priority over teaching students to think?

Culture is a collective heritage to which all human beings should have access.

But it only enriches the person who, through his power of understanding, may possess it.

The faculty, aptitude or capacity which allows the normal human being to become intelligent is all that is innate.

CULTURAL MYTHS

If we oppose one thing we support its opposite
If there are two sides to an issue an intelligent, informed person must support one or the other
There is not enough money, food, space, fuel, intelligence, etc. to go around
50% of all Americans who marry get divorced
Many Americans have a profound skepticism about the existence of God
Gasoline is far more expensive than it "used to be"
Apathy and ignorance among the electorate lead to non-voting in presidential elections

MYTHS in EDUCATION

SCHOOL

American schools are worse than ever
High school drop-out rates are deplorable
Our students test much lower than students in other nations
Discipline is major problem in secondary schools
Formal learning is superior to informal learning
People are better off with school than without it

INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence is quantifiable, IQ scores have objective meaning
Intelligence is fixed, innate, and finite
We can definitively determine who the Gifted and Talented students are
Students do better when grouped for ability
The faster learner/thinker is the smarter learner/thinker
People can be objectively classified by ability: Bright, Average, Slow/Dumb

TEACHING/LEARNING

True learning is arduous, even painful
What we say to students greatly impacts learning
Teachers must motivate students to learn -- Teachers must correct students
Teaching and learning are distinct entities -- The "affective" is separate from the "cognitive"
"Delivery of Instruction" = Teaching/learning
Many people (14% or more) are "LD"
People need to be taught to read -- Reading occurs at age 6, rather than between 3-9

TESTING and GRADING

Grades are necessary to motivate students to learn -- Grades are necessary as "quality control"
Grades, grading scales, and teacher-made tests provide objective information
SAT scores are correlated with school quality -- SAT and IQ scores predict life success
The failing of students provides accountability
Fewer students failing means more students getting "easy A's"
There is such a thing as an A, B, or C student

More MYTHS in EDUCATION

TEACHERS

Are resistant to change
Need to be managed carefully
Cannot be trusted with-- keys, thermostats, phones, time, conference trips, teaching strategies, curriculum
Have a job that requires little special training
Are often overpaid and underworked

DISCIPLINE

Uniform standards lead to better behavior

Similar offenses must receive similar punishments

Disciplinary steps and procedures for all offenses should be clearly spelled out

Detention is an effective deterrent

Students need constant adult supervision

There are bad kids and good kids

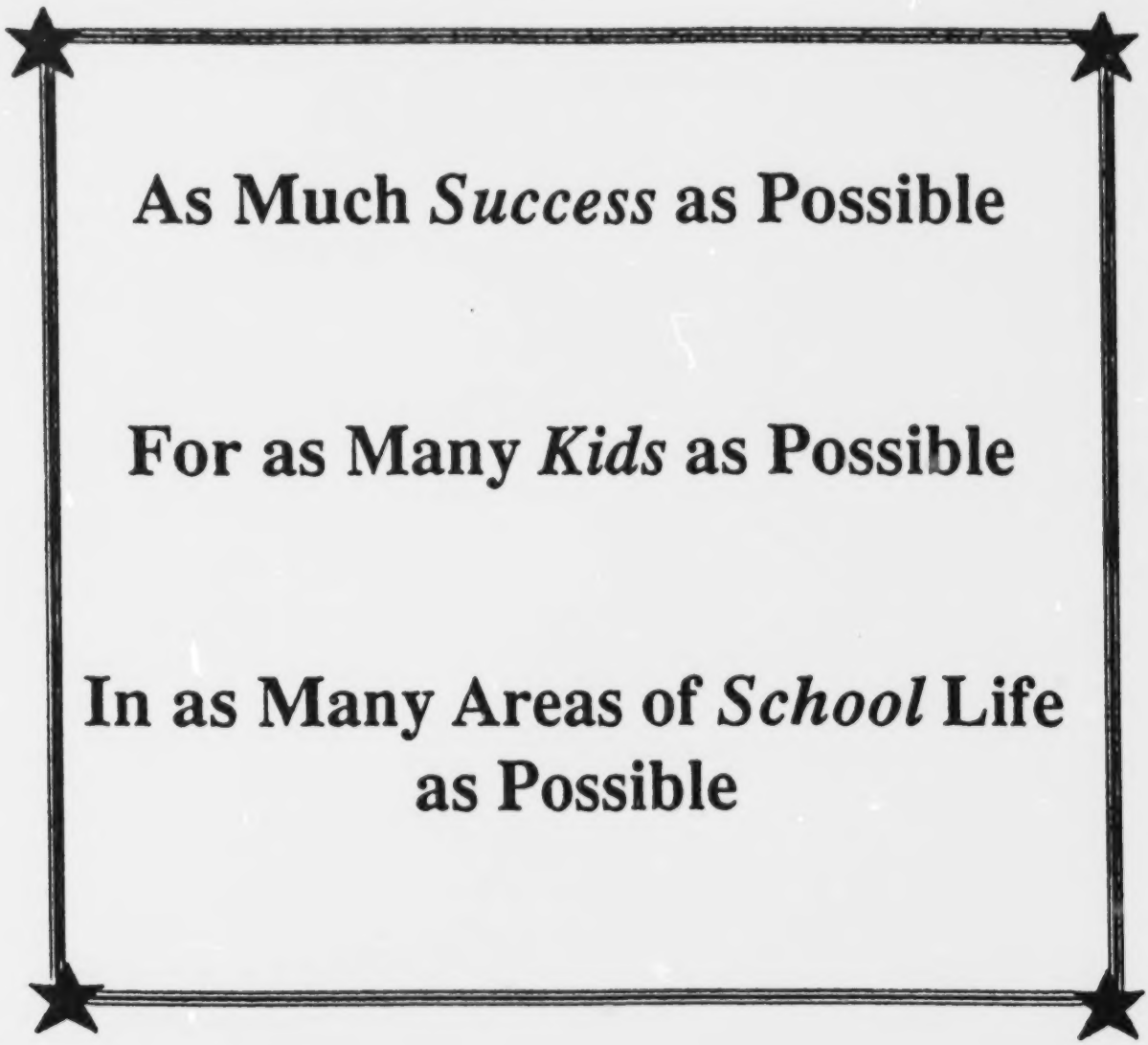
Parents do not trust school people and will always side with their child

If you make an exception it will backfire

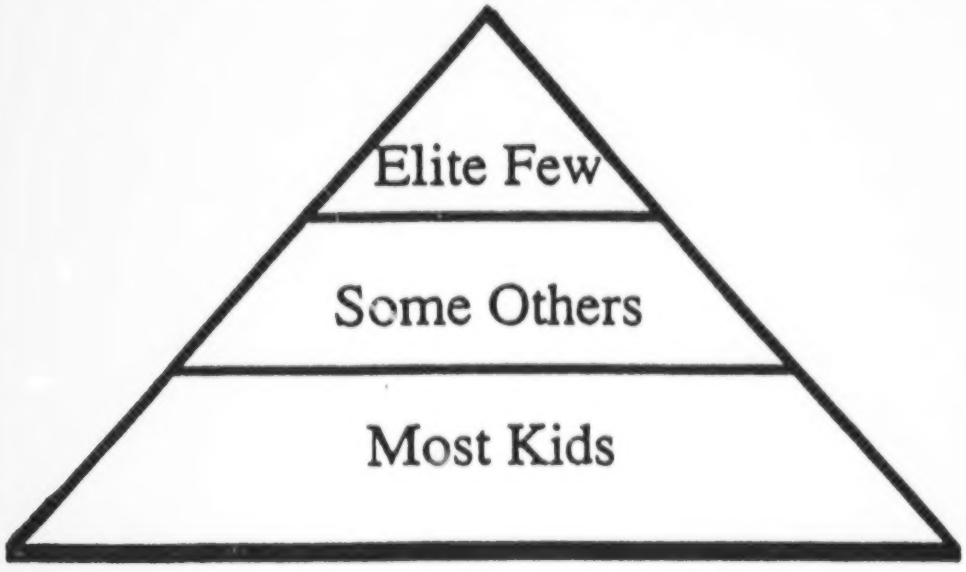
It is essential to maintain professional distance

Barry Raebeck, 1992

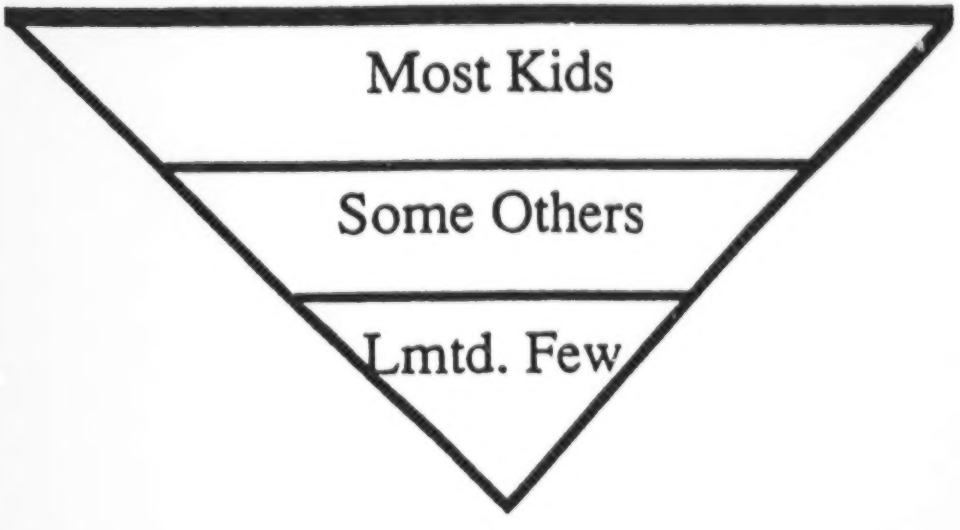
A Legitimate Educational Goal



Traditional/Meritocratic Grouping Pattern:
Pyramidal--Success is Scarce



Optimal/Democratic Grouping Pattern:
Inverted Pyramid--All Kids Can Learn



12 QUESTIONABLE GRADING PRACTICES
And Accompanying Remedies

1. Varying Grading Scales
One Should be at Least as Likely to Pass as Fail

2. Worshipping Averages
Use Professional Judgement, Make Exceptions

3. Using Zeros Indiscriminately
Zeros have Rotten Effect on Student Averages

4. Following Pattern of Assign, Test, Grade, Teach
Teach First Before Formal Evaluation

5. Failing to Match Testing to Teaching
Closely Match Testing and Teaching

6. Ambushing Students
"Pop" Quizzes are Punitive and Non-motivational

R.L. Canady and P.L. Hotchkiss, 1989

12 QUESTIONABLE GRADING PRACTICES
And Accompanying Remedies (continued)

7. Suggesting that Success is Unlikely
Success Breeds Success

8. Practicing "Gotcha" Teaching
What is Wrong With Letting Students Know What is Expected of Them?

9. Grading First Efforts
Give Feedback Before Grades

10. Penalizing Students for Taking Risks
Policies Ought to Encourage Intellectual Risk-taking

11. Failing to Recognize Measurement Error
Maintain Balanced, Thoughtful, Grading Approach

12. Establishing Inconsistent Criteria
Teachers and Administrators Should Continually Review Grading Policies and Patterns

R.L. Canady and P.L. Hotchkiss, 1989

Learning, Sharing, Growing, Caring

MIDDLE SCHOOL

REPORT CARD

STUDENT: _____

GRADE/TEAM: _____

TEACHER ADVISOR: _____

YEAR: _____

OUR EDUCATIONAL GOAL

To educate the whole person as fully as possible in 4 domains: the Intellectual, the Personal, the Social, and the Physical. All these are important and receive full emphasis in our program. We believe that every student can learn successfully and become a productive, positive life-long learner.

EXPLANATION OF GRADES:

O = Outstanding
S = Satisfactory
N = Needs Improvement
/ = Not Observed or Not Applicable

A = Outstanding
B = Commendable
C = Satisfactory
I = Incomplete
U = Unacceptable
CP = Conditional Pass

Notes: A CP may be given when the staff determines the student is able to master work at grade level despite missing much school due to extenuating circumstances.
A U at a final grade requires summer school make-up.

OUR EVALUATION GOAL

We individualize evaluation by providing comprehensive, cooperative and autoqueous learning experiences. Students work individually, in small groups and in larger teams. Achievement, Effort, Ability, Improvement and Citizenship are all considered in providing students and parents with as full an evaluation as possible.

CORE CURRICULUM: PERFORMANCE

Academic _____ Personal/Social _____

Language Arts/Social Studies — Teacher(s) _____

Thinks creatively
Communicates in writing
Communicates in speaking
Listens actively
Is organized and efficient
Reading Grade Level
/ = begin year X = end year

Is cooperative
Is an active learner
Is prepared and on time
Works independently
Works in groups

well above | above | on | below | well below

Mathematics/Science — Teacher(s) _____

Thinks in depth
Asks probing questions
Performance on tests
Produces quality work
Completes assignments
Mathematics Grade Level
/ = begin year X = end year

Is cooperative
Is an active learner
Is prepared and on time
Works independently
Works in groups

well above | above | on | below | well below

Physical Education/Health — Teacher(s) _____

Development of motor skills
Knowledge of health concepts
Knowledge of safety procedures
Values wellness behavior
Knows and applies game rules
Physical Fitness Test Results
FALL
SPRING
Fitness Grade Level
/ = begin year X = end year

Is cooperative
Is an active learner
Is prepared and on time
Works independently
Works in groups

Flexibility | Abdom. Strength | Pull-Up

well above | above | on | below | well below

GRADES

Core

Language Arts
Social Studies
Mathematics
Science
Physical Ed./Health
Resource
Other _____

1 2 3 4 Yr.

Electives/Explorations

1 2 3 4 5

ELECTIVES: PERFORMANCE

1. _____

Is creative and resourceful
Produces quality work
Is developing new skills
Is responsible and cooperative
Understands concepts taught

1 2 3 4 Yr.

2. _____

Is creative and resourceful
Produces quality work
Is developing new skills
Is responsible and cooperative
Understands concepts taught

1 2 3 4 Yr.

ADVISOR'S ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT GROWTH

Intellectual

1 2 3 4 Yr.

Social/Emotional

1 2 3 4 Yr.

OUR SCHOOL RULES

Respect People Respect Property

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

LETTER OF COMMENDATION

Student Name (print) _____ Date _____

Teacher/Administrator (print) _____

The items checked below indicate exceptional behavior in that area. Your child may also be performing quite well in most or all other areas listed without that being officially noted in this way.

ATTITUDE

___ friendliness

___ courtesy/respect

___ cooperation

___ appearance

___ open-mindedness

___ persistence

___ citizenship

___ honesty/trustworthiness

___ manners/consideration of others

___ willingness to try new things

___ humor/enjoyment of the learning process

___ significant improvement in attitude/behavior

___ other _____

_____

___ other _____

_____

ATTENDANCE

___ regular attendance

___ attentiveness

___ concentration

___ getting to class on time

___ other _____

_____

PRODUCTIVITY

___ effort

___ preparation for class

___ classroom participation

___ neat, attractive work

___ following through on assignments

___ doing more than required

___ significant academic progress

___ other _____

_____

COMMENTS: _____

_____

_____

Signature _____

Criteria for Grouping Students

Previous Grades/Performance

Teacher Recommendation
Guidance/Admin Recommendation

Parent Choice
Student Choice

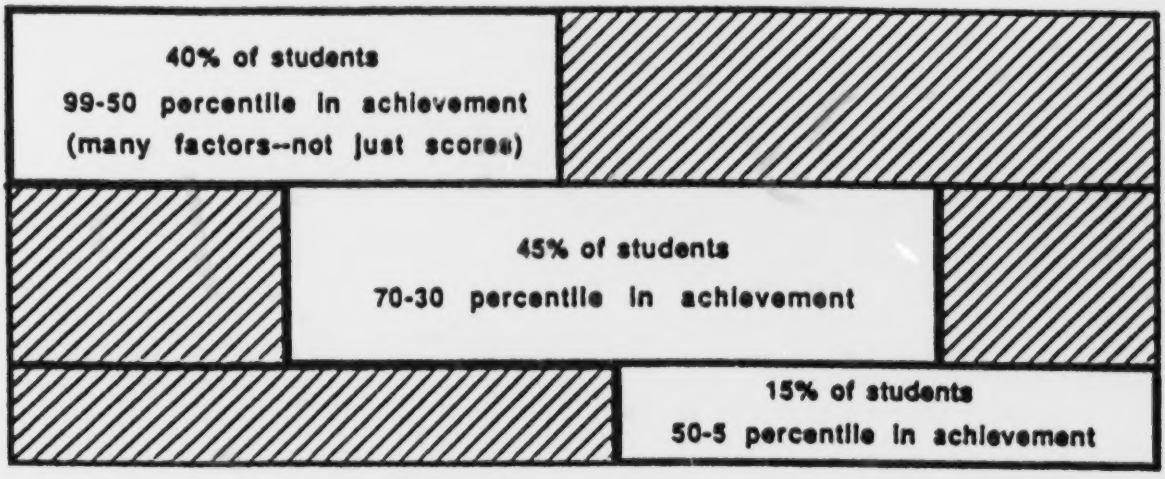
Current Performance

Demographics: Gender, Geographic,
Racial Balance, etc.
School/District Philosophy

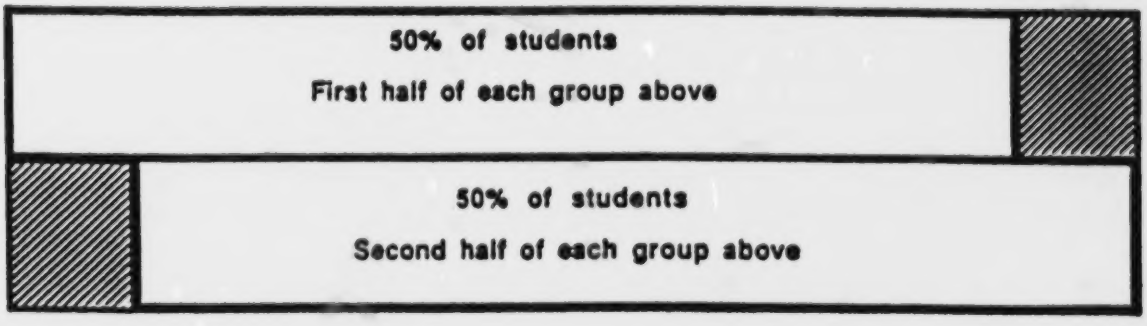
Diagnostic Tool/Test
Standardized Test Scores

A FLEXIBLE GROUPING ARRANGEMENT

Grouping for Mathematics and Language Arts



Grouping for Social Studies and Science



Note: Achievement ranges are based on many factors not simply standardized test scores. These ranges will of course vary in different student populations.

Grouping Without Tracking

Flexible grouping by Achvmt in Math and L.Arts.
Regrouping in Social Studies and Science.

Letters represent groups of 12-15 students:
A= Highest Achvmt, H = Lowest Achvmt

Subject: Period	Math	L.Arts	SocStud	Science
1	A, C	E, G	B, F	D, H
2	E, G	A, C	D, H	B, F
3	B, D	F, H	A, E	C, G
4	F, H	B, D	C, G	A, E

THE LEARNING LAB

Replaces Remedial Reading

Fewer Kids, Served Better

Inviting Atmosphere

Wholistic Approach

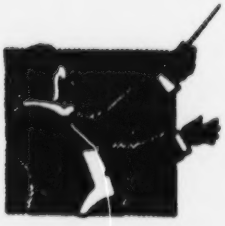
Innovative Staff

Central Location

Part of a Team

PLAY TEACHING and REAL TEACHING

Play Teachers (PTs) Deliver Instruction to Students
Real Teachers (RTs) Do Teaching/Learning with Students



PTs Grade and Categorize Students
RTs Enable Students to Self-evaluate

PTs See Students as Subordinates
RTs See Students as Clients

PTs See Parents as Adversaries
RTs See Parents as Colleagues

PTs Distrust Research and Innovation
RTs Thrive on New Info and Methods

PTs Teach to Live
RTs Live to Teach

PTs View Peers as Competitors
RTs View Peers as Allies and Resources

PTs Believe Intelligence is Quantifiable
RTs Know Intelligence is Complex, Even Mysterious

PTs like Narrow, Consistent Rules
RTs like Broad and Flexible Rules

PTs Impose Punishments on the Group
RTs Deal with Individual Problems

PTs Go "By the Book"
RTs Read "The Book" and Throw it Away

Elements of Dynamic Education

Barry S. Raebeck

A balance of freedom and and discipline is sought in the classroom

A balance of tradition and innovation is sought in the curriculum

All participants are expected to do their best always

All are encouraged to respect themselves, one another, and the environment

Participants assume responsibility for their own learning

Students are competing with their own potential, not with their friends

Teachers are teacher/learners and students are learner/teachers

Lasting knowledge is gained through understanding of structures and integrated wholes moreso than by memorizing isolated bits of information

Intelligence is not something simply measurable, finite, nor merely innate

All have the right to become increasingly intelligent through educational experiences that expand capacities and encourage continual growth

The finest teaching/learning is simultaneously a joyous and rigorous process